



Planning Division
Department of Development Services
Meeting Minutes of the
Planning & Zoning Commission
DRAFT(Subject to approval)

REGULAR MEETING OF THE PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
TUESDAY, April 10, 2012

Commissioners Present

Sandra Bobowski
Temple Shannon
David Blatt
John Lupo, Jr.
Edwin Vargas
Valerio Giadone
Anthony Koos

Commissioner Absent

Gerry Pleasant (Alternate Member)

Staff Present

Roger O'Brien
Kim Holden
Lynda Crespo
Jonathan Mullen

Chairwoman Bobowski called the meeting to order. Secretary O'Brien read the roll call. There was a quorum.

Due to a large number of attendees for the Zoning Map Change application public hearing, the Commission made a motion to move 777 Main Street, Special Permit application as the first public hearing item.

I. Public Hearing

- a. 777 Main Street-Special Permit application and site plan review for the renovation of an existing office and financial services building into 286 studio, one bedroom and two bedroom mixed income residential units and 35,000 square feet of commercial retail space and the approval of a transportation management plan with reduced parking. Applicant-Becker Development LLC, Owner-Grunberg 777 Main, LLC, Agent-Bruce Becker

Chairwoman Bobowski opened the public hearing. Roll was taken; there was a quorum.

Principal Planner Jonathan Mullen presented a summary of the Special Permit application for the conversion of an office building to a mixed used residential/commercial building. The proposed project consisted of studio, one and two bedroom units with common and amenity spaces and commercial/retail space. The commercial spaces were located on the ground and second floors; residential units were located on the ground floor, third, fourth through eighth and tenth through twenty fifth floors. The parking plan consisted of surface parking within the site area and the existing parking garage structure. The existing parking plan for the project did not meet the minimum requirements for the B-1 zoning

district. The applicant requested the Commission reduce the required parking from 413 spaces to 249 spaces. The applicant submitted a transportation management plan to justify the reduction. The site consisted of three separate lots that made up one zoning lot. The applicant must submit a circulation plan to demonstrate pedestrian walkways from the parking garage across the parking area, to the building. The building was designed by noted modern architect Welton Becket. There were no exterior changes other than façade cleaning planned for the tower. The applicant proposed to place a covenant on the city land records that would run with the land for a period of twenty years or whatever the Commission deemed fit to ensure future compliance with the transportation management plan. The site plan submitted by the applicant showed street lighting, but no lighting in the parking areas, building entrances, or pedestrian walkways were shown. There was a small area of landscaping located at the southwestern corner of the site and a small elevated platform with picnic table that spanned the southeast entrance to the site. The existing building was in need of asbestos abatement in order to become habitable. The applicant submitted a plan that proposed a combination of encapsulation and removal of any asbestos on the site and would comply with all EPA, CT DEEP and CT Department of Health standards for asbestos abatement.

With the exception of the parking requirement, the proposed project met all the requirements for a mixed use residential/commercial retail building. The planning and zoning analysis reported by Mr. Mullen indicated that the adaptive reuse of 777 Main Street was directly in line with the Planning Themes in *One City, One Plan* to advance the Downtown's role as the region's center for commerce, culture and city living and to promote livable and sustainable neighborhoods. The project was in accordance with *One City, One Plan* themes of enhancing mobility through transit pedestrian and bike systems, and integrating sustainable practices through the measures outlined in the transportation management plan. The adaptive reuse of the building was in accordance with the planning theme in *One City, One Plan* of protecting the city's natural and built environment.

Bruce Becker, with Becker Development LLC, thanked the planning staff for their support.

Mike Marshall was in favor of the housing concept in downtown Hartford but, expressed concerns about the degree of the parking reduction for the proposed project.

Michael Zoleski, Executive Director of the Hartford Improvement District spoke in favor of the project. He stated that there was a demand for downtown housing.

Wayne Benjamin, Director of Economic Development with the City of Hartford – Department of Development Services, expressed his support of the proposed project.

Commissioner Giadone felt that a recreational plan was needed.

The Planning Division recommended approval of the conversion of 777 Main Street from an office building to a mixed use residential/commercial retail building subjected to the following conditions:

- The applicant submits a revised circulation plan that showed pedestrian walkways from the parking garage across the parking area to the building.
- The applicant submits a plan demonstrating that the water and sewer utilities are adequate to serve a residential use.
- The applicant submits a lighting plan that addresses parking area, pedestrian walkway, and building entrance lighting.
- The applicant submits a plan showing on site recreation facilities for residences as well as walking distances to alternatives areas of open and recreational space.
- The applicant submits a site drainage plan showing that there will be no net increase in runoff due to change in use.
- The Director of Planning is authorized to approve conditions

Director of Planning Roger J. O'Brien spoke of behalf of the City of Hartford staff. He thanked the developer Bruce Becker and his staff for their professionalism through the permit process. Mr. O'Brien stated that the City was delighted to work with the developer.

Chairwoman Bobowski closed the public hearing.

- b. Zoning map change application to change 1265, 1283 and 1315 Asylum Avenue (Map, Block and Lot #'s 132-311-114, 131-311-059, and 131-311-060 – The former Hartford College for Women site) from a R8 zoning district to a R7 zoning district. The area is generally bounded by Asylum Avenue, Girard Avenue and Elizabeth Street. Applicant-Capitol Region Education Council, Owner-University of Hartford, Agent-David S. Hoopes.**

Due to a large number of attendees, Roger J. O'Brien, Secretary of the Planning and Zoning Commission and Director of Planning, gave specific sign-in instructions to the public who wanted to testify for or against the proposed zone change.

Principal Planner Jeff Cormier presented a summary of the Planning Division's Report to the Commission. The applicant proposed a zone change from an R-8 district to R-7 district. Mr. Cormier reported that most of the abutting properties were in the R-8 district with the exception of the R-7 district south of the proposed location. The proposed zone change would increase the density of the 10 acre land. Mr. Cormier presented the difference between the physical requirements and distinctions among the uses in the R-7 and R-8 districts. Most schools were a conditional use in the R-7 district, but were not permitted in the R-8 district. Another difference included the type of single-family use, where semidetached and attached single family building were a conditional use in the R-8 district, but not permitted in the R-7 district. Other conditional uses permitted in the R-7 district, but not permitted in the R-8 district were churches, religious quarters and children's homes. The Planning Division prepared information pertinent to the issues, and provided the Commission with two resolutions, should the Commission have or have not found the proposed zoning map change to be compatible with the Plan of Conservation and Development and protected the health, welfare and public safety.

David Hoopes was the agent that represented the applicant, the University of Hartford. The University of Hartford hired a consulting firm known as Bartram & Cochran to analyze the reutilization of the University's Asylum Avenue Campus. The firm concluded that the only feasible use was a school, due to current and future market conditions. Mr. Hoopes stated that it would make sense to change the zone for the future use of the site because a continued use as a college campus was not necessary and the conversion to a residential use was not feasible. He stated that no private developer could afford to rehabilitate the historic mansions at the property. He stated that CREC was prepared to rehabilitate the mansions with monies they received from the State of Connecticut. CREC's proposal included demolition of the 1960's style buildings to be replaced with a new building that would complement the historic mansions. Mr. Hoopes summarized the traffic report he submitted to staff. He stated that the report indicated that there would not be a noticeable adverse effect in traffic increase at the major intersections.

Bruce Douglas, Executive Director of the Capital Region Education Council (CREC) spoke about the proposed school at the subject site and felt that it would benefit the City.

Don Walsh stated that CREC met with the neighborhood group WECA Museum Academy Advisory Committee, to listen to the concerns and ideas of the neighborhood. He stated that the school project would turn the site into a jewel by restoring the historic mansions, preserving the trees, removal of the 1960's style building with a new 33,000 square foot building that would complement the historic buildings, accommodate the school buses so that it would never have to wait on Elisabeth Street, reduce parking spaces to add more green spaces, and provide admission preference to residents in the West End.

Ken McCoy, Project Architect of Smith, Edwards and McCoy gave a brief overview of the proposed plan that would restore the historic features.

Individual testimonies were heard in the order listed on the sign-in sheets. Thirteen individuals testified in favor of the zoning map change; eighteen testified against. Linda Jorgensen, neighborhood resident, submitted for the record emails responds on a survey she sent to members of WECA and other residents of the area. It was noted that the majority of respondents opposed to the zoning map change. A petition opposing the proposed zoning map change was submitted to the Commission, for the record.

Chairwoman Bobowski thanked all the residents for their involvement and stated that one of the City's biggest assets was the passion of its residents. Commissioner Vargas stated that he found it hard to support a neighborhood project that most of the neighborhood was against. Commissioner Giadone expressed concerns of spot zoning, if the proposed zoning map change passed. Commissioners Blatt and Lupo, Jr. concurred with Commissioners Vargas and Giadone.

Chairwoman Bobowski closed the public hearing.

II. Regular Meeting

i) Consideration of Public Hearing Items

a. 777 Main Street-Special Permit application and site plan review for the renovation of an existing office and financial services building into 286 studio, one bedroom and two bedroom mixed income residential units and 35,000 square feet of commercial retail space and the approval of a transportation management plan with reduced parking.

A motion to approve the following resolution was made by Commissioner Vargas, and seconded by Commissioner Lupo, Jr.:

- Whereas, The City of Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission has reviewed a special permit application to convert 777 Main Street from office use to mixed use residential and commercial retail use with 286 mixed income units and 35,000 square feet of commercial retail space; and
- Whereas, The City of Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission has reviewed a transportation management plan to reduce the number of required parking spaces for this project from 413 spaces to 249 spaces; and
- Whereas, The project is the adaptive re-use and historic restoration of the former Bank of America office tower; and
- Whereas, The applicant has submitted a plan for asbestos abatement in the building that will require DEEP approval; and
- Whereas, The applicant has submitted a transportation management plan that demonstrates that alternate modes of transportation will be use for this project and that the requested reduction in parking is in keeping with goals of *One City, One Plan*; and
- Whereas, The proposed project is in accordance with all five planning themes of *One City, One Plan*, which are; To Promote Livable and Sustainable Neighborhoods, Protect the City's Natural and Built and Environment, Enhance Mobility Through Transit, Pedestrian, and Bike Systems City-Wide, Advance Downtown's Role as the Region's Center for Commerce, Culture, and City Living, and To Promote and Encourage the Integration of Sustainable Practices; Now Therefore Be it
- Resolved, That the City of Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission hereby approves the application to convert 777 Main Street from office use to mixed use residential and commercial retail use with 286 mixed income units and 35,000 square feet of commercial retail space as shown in the plans entitled "777 Main Street", dated March 27, 2012, scale 1/16" = 1', and the transportation management plan entitled " 777

Main Street Hartford, CT Transportation Management Plan” dated April, 2012 prepared by Becker and Becker Associates, Inc. 95 Reef Road, Fairfield, CT 06824, subject to the following conditions:

1. The applicant submits a revised circulation plan that shows pedestrian walkways from the parking garage across the parking area to the building.
2. The applicant submits a plan demonstrating that the water and sewer utilities are adequate to serve a residential use.
3. The applicant submits a lighting plan that addresses parking area, pedestrian walkway, and building entrance lighting.
4. The applicant submits a plan showing on site recreation facilities for residences as well as walking distances to alternative areas of open and recreational space.
5. The applicant submits a site drainage plan showing that there will be no net increase in runoff due to the change in use.
6. All conditions of this approval will be in effect for the life or the Special Permit.
7. The Director of Planning is authorized to approve conditions 1- 5.

The following Commissioners voted in favor: Bobowski, Blatt, Lupo, Jr., Shannon, Vargas, Giadone and Koos.

b. Zoning map change application to change 1265, 1283 and 1315 Asylum Avenue (Map, Block and Lot #'s 132-311-114, 131-311-059, and 131-311-060 – the former Hartford College for Women site) from an R8 zoning district to a R7 zoning district. The area is generally bonded by Asylum Avenue, Girard Avenue and Elizabeth Street.

On a motion made by Commissioner Vargas, and seconded by Commissioner Lupo, Jr. the following resolution passed:

- Whereas: The Planning and Zoning Commission has reviewed the application for a zone change of 1265, 1283 and 1315 Asylum Avenue and 50 Elizabeth Street from R-8 to R-7; and
- Whereas: Most of the adjacent parcels are located in the R-8 district except for the south side of Elizabeth Street, which is located in the R-7 district; and
- Whereas: The proposed zone change to the R-7 district increases the potential density of the least dense area in the City; and
- Whereas: Changing the site to the R-7 district allows for a potential use, education services, that is not compatible with the underlying land use plan designation of Low Density Residential development; and
- Whereas: A goal of the 2010 One City One Plan as well as the 2012 West End Civic Association Strategic Plan is to encourage conversion of institutional uses on residential streets to private residential uses; and

- Whereas: The purpose of the R-8 district is to protect single-family residences and to conserve the single-family character of these areas; and
- Whereas: Institutional uses in the R-7 district may have a greater traffic impact on residential streets; and
- Therefore: The Planning and Zoning Commission finds that the proposed zone map change is not compatible with the 2010 Plan of Conservation and Development and does not promote the health, welfare, and public safety of the community; now be it
- Resolved: The City of Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission hereby denies the zoning map change from R-8 to R-7 zoning district for the properties 1265, 1283 and 1315 Asylum Avenue and 50 Elizabeth Street as depicted in the map titled “1265, 1283, 1315 Asylum Avenue Zoning Map Change From R-8 to R-7” filed at the Office of the City Clerk on March 21, 2012.

The following Commissioners voted in favor of the resolution: Bobowski, Blatt, Lupo, Jr., Shannon, Vargas, Giadone and Koos.

III. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of February 28, 2012, March 13, 2012 and March 27, 2012 were approved.

IV. Adjournment

Respectfully submitted by
Lynda Crespo, Administrative Assistant

Roger J. O'Brien, Planning Director/Secretary